

Salem Merchants: Patriots and Privateers

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Salem Maritime National Historic Site



When the American colonies declared their independence from Great Britain, the infant nation was in no position to defy British rule of the seas. The Americans responded with the time-honored practice of privateering an industry born of necessity during the American Revolution.

This curriculum-based lesson plan is one in a thematic set on the American Revolution using lessons from other Massachusetts National Parks. Also are:

[Boston National Historical Park](#)
Bunker Hill- Patriots of Color

[Minuteman National Historical Park](#)
Lexington and Concord: A Legacy of Conflict

[Adams National Historic Park](#)
Abigail Adams: A Citizen in Historic Times

Included in this lesson are several pages of supporting material. To help identify these pages the following icons may be used:



To indicate a Primary Source page



To indicate a Secondary Source page



To Indicate a Student handout



To indicate a Teacher resource

Lesson Document

Link on the page to the document



Enduring Understanding

Individuals often take great personal risks during wartime, sometimes with great profit.

Essential Question

How did the Salem merchants use privateering both to earn a profit and help the colonies win the war?

[Salem Maritime National Historic Site](#) in Salem, Massachusetts, commemorates the maritime history of New England and the United States. As a maritime port, Salem and its shipping industry helped to shape the economy of Massachusetts. When the American colonies declared their independence from Great Britain, the infant nation was in no position to defy British rule of the seas. In 1776, Britain possessed the world's most powerful navy. The Royal Navy—once the protector of American shipping—now made every effort to suppress and destroy it. The Americans responded to the situation with the time-honored practice of privateering. American privateering activity during the American Revolution became an industry born of necessity. Patriotic private citizens were encouraged to harass British shipping while risking their lives and resources for profit. The port of Salem boasted the largest number of privateers during the Revolution.

In this lesson, students examine primary source documents to learn about the role of privateering during the American Revolution. Students discover why citizens became involved in privateering and how privateers helped the new nation during the war.

Content Objective/Outcomes	Language Objective/Outcomes
<p>The students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the role of Salem privateers in the American Revolution. Summarize how profit serves as an incentive for people. Explain how the actions of the privateers contributed to the outcome of the American Revolution. 	<p>The students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze primary source documents to identify the main idea. Use information from documents to write a focused, well-organized letter that draws information from a variety of sources and includes supporting details.

Number of Days: 1

Intended Grade/Range: 5th

Resources/MaterialsWebsite:

Salem Maritime National Historic Site at www.nps.gov/sama
 National Park Service American Revolution website at <http://www.nps.gov/revwar>

Source Documents:

Order of Congress
 Transcription of Order
 Translation of Order

Advertisement for Privateer

List of Private Armed Ships

Map: The colonies at the time of the American Revolution

Teaching/Learning Sequence**Launch:**

Show the class a map of the colonies at the time of the American Revolution. Ask students to think about how goods and supplies entered the colonies from abroad. Ask students to imagine why seaports would be in danger of British attack. Share the following facts about the numbers of ships in the American and British navies during the war:

- The American Navy began the war with two ships in October of 1775. By the end of the war, the American Navy consisted of about fifty ships, with only about twenty engaged in the war at any given time.
- The British Navy began the war with about 270 ships and by the end of the war had over 450 ships.

Ask students what options the Americans had in order to compete with the British Navy. Remind them that the colonies had never had a navy, Congress did not have the money to provide ships, and there were not enough men available to form an official navy.

Introduce the word “privateer.” Privateer: a privately-owned, armed sea vessel commissioned by Congress to attack and raid the ships of an enemy nation during times of war. In return, these captains and their crews were allowed to keep a share of the captured plunder.

Ask the class why Congress might have viewed privateers as a good option during the Revolution. Read the John Adams quotation below, and discuss why Adams thought privateering was a good way to increase protection on the seas.

“A Navy is our natural and our only adequate defense. But we have only one way to increase our shipping and seamen, and that is privateering. This pays its own expenses and procures its own men . . . and is the surest way of distressing their commerce, [and] protecting our own . . .” John Adams to the President of Congress, October 14, 1780.

Although outnumbered, the American Navy still managed to sink or capture almost 200 royal ships. During the course of the war, American privateers sank or captured around 2,000 British ships (both naval and merchant) and captured almost 12,000 men.)

Exploration:

Privateering encompassed two levels of participation. A Letter of Marque authorized armed merchant ships to challenge any likely enemy vessel that crossed their path during the course of a commercial voyage. A Privateer Commission was issued to vessels, called privateers or cruisers, whose primary objective was to disrupt enemy shipping. The ideal target was an unarmed or lightly armed commercial ship.

With the passage of an act on March 23, 1776, the Continental Congress formalized the commissioning process, and uniform rules of conduct were established. Owners of privateers had to post monetary bonds to ensure their proper conduct under the regulations.

Lesson Document

Divide the class into small groups. Have each group answer the following questions using Document 1, dated April 3, 1776. Document 1 is provided in three versions: the original document, the transcribed document, and a translation of the document that is easier to read and understand. Select the appropriate document version for your students.

1. How much money did the owners of ships under 100 tons have to put up? What about ships over 100 tons?
2. What ships were privateers not allowed to attack?
3. When an enemy ship was captured, the captain needed to send a letter to Congress. What information needed to be in the letter? Why do you think Congress would want this information?
4. What was the penalty for not following the rules?
5. With the possibility of losing so much money, why do you think someone would have wanted to own a privateer?

Summary:

Lesson Document

Ask students to look at Document 2, an advertisement that begins “Now fitting for a Privateer.” How is the author trying to convince people to sign on to the privateer’s crew?

Lesson Document

Have students look at Document 3, the list of private armed ships fitted out of Salem between 1776 and 1783. How many ships were there? How many were captured? Explain to students that sailors who worked on a ship that was captured by a privateer were treated as prisoners of war.

Assessment:

Have students complete one of the following writing assignments:

Imagine you are a sailor who is trying to decide whether to go out on a privateer. What would you be risking? What would you have to gain? Are there other factors that would affect your decision? Write a letter home in which you state and defend your decision.

Or

Imagine you are Elias Hasket Derby, a prominent Salem citizen who has already become wealthy in the shipping industry. Decide whether or not you are going to risk your ships and money to go into privateering. Write a letter to a friend or business partner explaining and defending your decision. influenced and was influenced by the American Revolution:



The Power of Place

Site Visit:

Have you ever stood on the spot where some historical event occurred and felt a sense of awe and inspiration? This is the power of place you can experience when you visit a National Park. Historic places provide us with opportunities to connect with the lives of the generations before us. The power of place is that it gives history immediacy and relevance. As historian David McCullough* states, "When you stand there, in that very real, authentic place, you feel the presence of that other time, that history in a way that would be impossible did it not exist."

Visit Salem Maritime National Historic Site to see the actual seaport from which privateers embarked to sail around the world. During your visit, explore the Derby House, home to Elias Hasket and Elizabeth Derby for twenty years, walk on board the replica tall ship *Friendship*, and investigate the West India Goods Store to discover what kinds of goods came to Salem from around the world. In conjunction with this lesson plan, seeing these sites in person helps students think about why Salem's maritime history is important to our history as Americans, what risks individuals took in the fight for freedom, and how such acts contributed to the success of the American colonists.

Students can start their visit at the Orientation Center by viewing "To the Farthest Ports of the Rich East," an audio-visual program on the history of Salem's maritime trade and traditions. See the Salem Maritime National Historic Site website for a description of the show and information about ranger-guided programs that can add further layers of meaning to what students discover in this lesson.

At the park, students can participate in a curriculum-based program called "Building the Nation." In this seventy-five-minute program, students learn more about the role Salem played not only in fighting the American Revolution, but also in providing economic support for the new nation. Students working in groups explore the Custom House to discover six different jobs needed for the successful collection of customs duties. In the West India Goods Store Activity, students examine both domestic and imported products, locate the country of origin for imports on a map, prepare goods for consumption, and calculate the costs for the consumer of imported goods. In the Measurement Activity, students take on the role of a Weigher, Measurer, or Gauger and complete weighing, measuring, and gauging tasks, using their findings to calculate import duties. The program concludes in the Public Stores, where students discuss how customs duties supported the federal government. Contact the Program Coordinator for reservations and information at 978/740-1662.

* From "History Lost and Found," *Journal of the National Historic Trust for Preservation*. Winter, 2002.

Connections to the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework Standards:

History

HISTORY and SOCIAL SCIENCE

5.11 Explain the importance of maritime commerce in the development of the economy of colonial Massachusetts, using historical societies and museums as needed.

- A. the fishing and shipbuilding industries
- B. trans-Atlantic trade
- C. the port cities of New Bedford, Newburyport, Gloucester, Salem, and Boston

5.17 Describe the major battles of the Revolution and explain the factors leading to American victory and British defeat.

Economics

CONCEPTS AND SKILLS: ECONOMICS

13. Define profit and describe how profit is an incentive for entrepreneurs.

English Language Arts

ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS

13.17 Identify and analyze main ideas, supporting ideas, and supporting details. (Nonfiction)

19.16 Write brief research reports with clear focus and supporting detail. (For informational/expository writing)

24.3 Apply steps for obtaining information from a variety of sources, organizing information, documenting sources, and presenting research in individual projects.

ELPBO

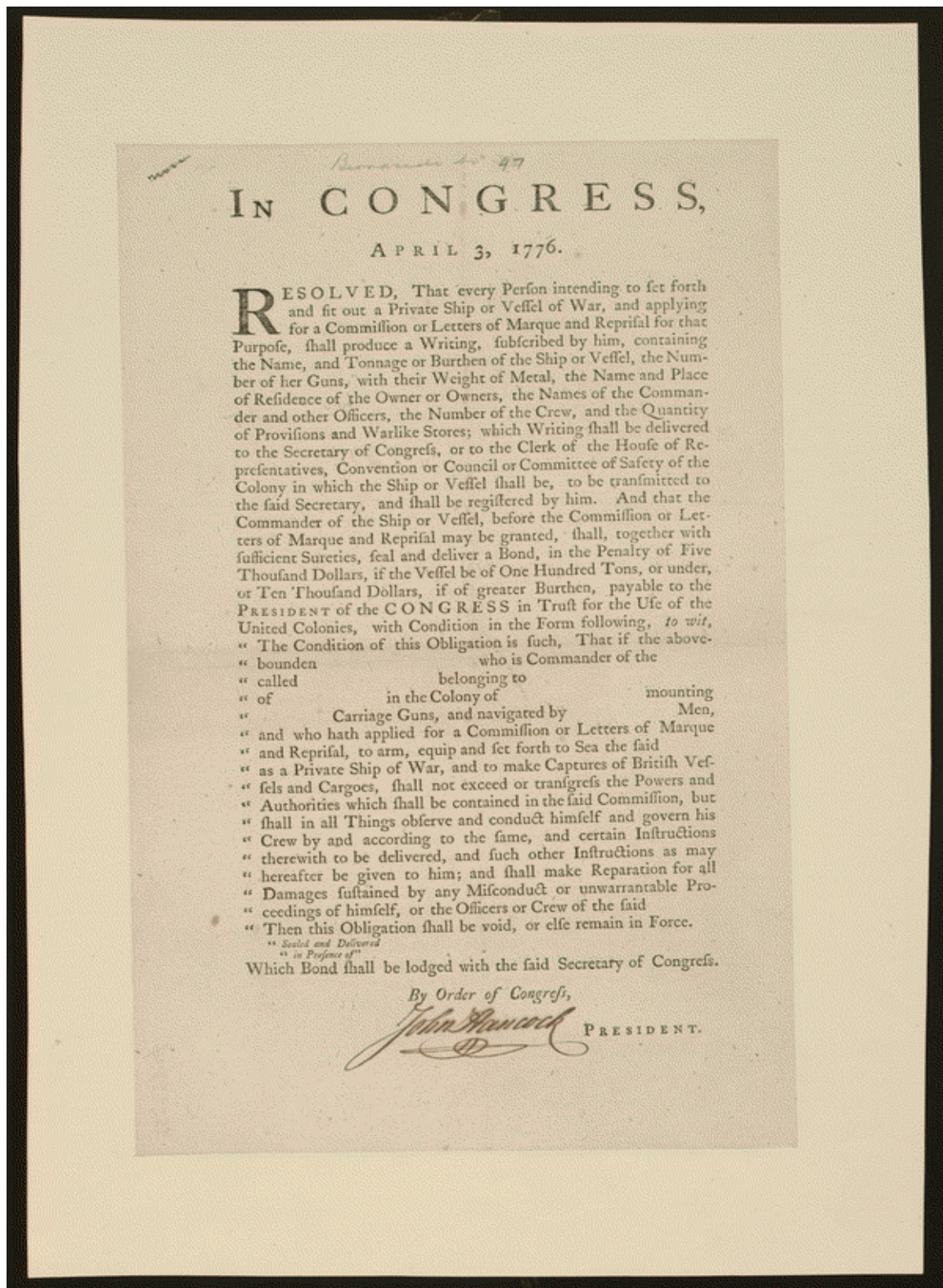
ELPBO (English Language Arts Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes):

S.3 Students will comprehend and communicate orally, using spoken English to participate in academic settings.

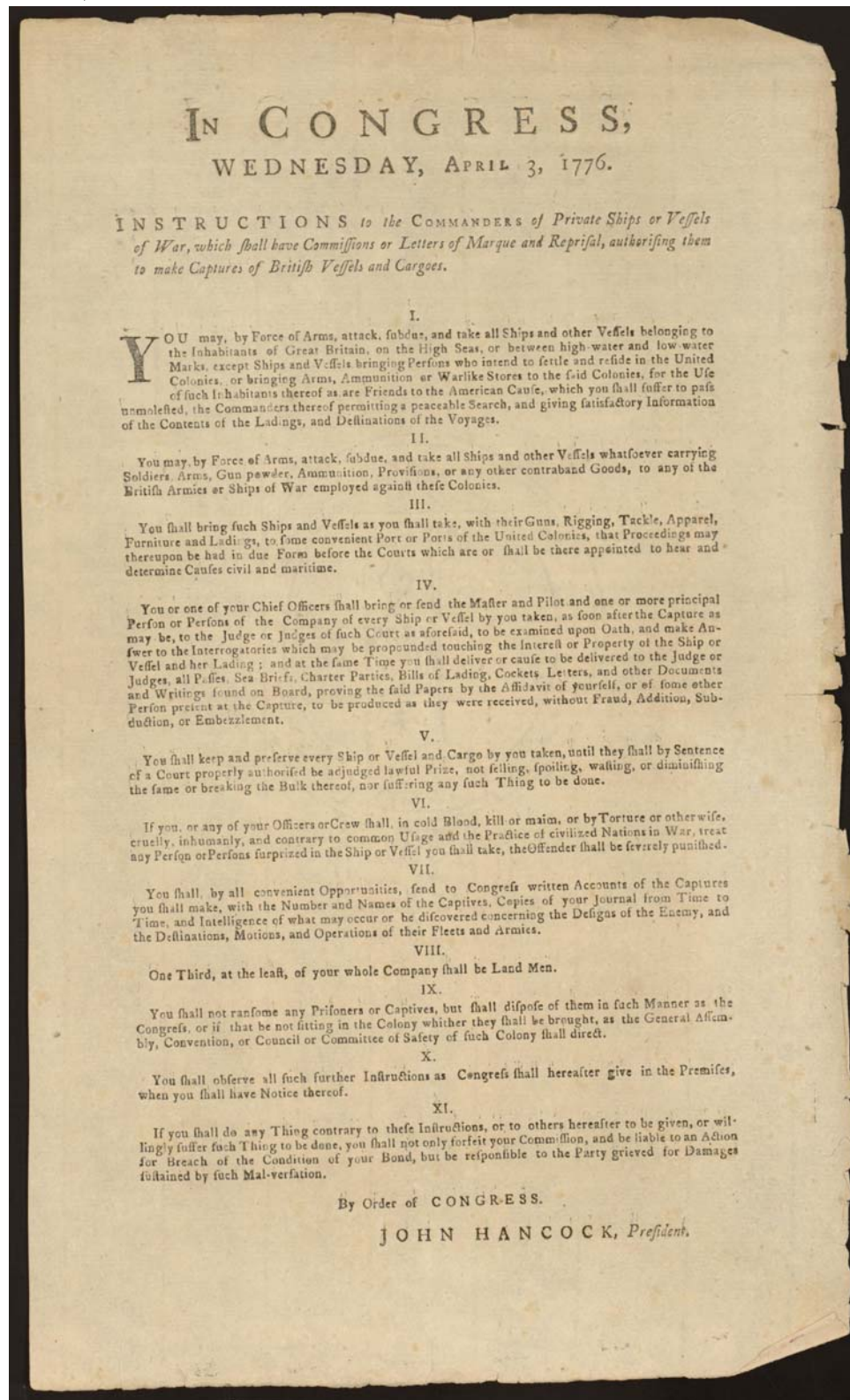
R.3 Students will read English fluently and identify facts and evidence in order to interpret and analyze text.

W.2 Students will write in English for a variety of purposes with clear focus, coherent organization, and sufficient detail.

Document 1



Document 1 (continued)



Document 1: Transcription

IN CONGRESS,

April 3, 1776.

Resolved, That every Person intending to set forth and fit out a Private Ship or Vessel of War, and applying for a Commission or Letters of Marque and Reprisal for that Purpose, shall produce a Writing, subscribed by him, containing the Name, and Tonnage or Burthen of the Ship or Vessel, the Number of her Guns, with their Weight of Metal, the Name and Place of Residence of the Owner or Owners, the Names of the Commander and other Officers, the Number of the Crew, the Quantity of Provisions and Warlike Stores; which Writing shall be delivered to the Secretary of Congress, or to the Clerk of the House of Representatives, Convention or Council or Committee of Safety of the Colony to which the Ship or Vessel shall be, to be transmitted to the said Secretary, and shall be registered by him. And that the Commander of the Ship or Vessel, before the Commission or Letters of Marque and Reprisal may be granted, shall, together with sufficient Sureties, seal and deliver a Bond, in the Penalty of Five Thousand Dollars, if the Vessel be of One Hundred Tons, or under, or Ten Thousand Dollars, if of greater Burthen, payable to the PRESIDENT of the CONGRESS in Trust for the Use of the United Colonies, with Condition in the form following, to wit,

" The Condition of this Obligation is such, That if the above-
" bounden who is Commander of the
" called belonging to
" of in the Colony of mounting
" Carriage Guns, and navigated by Men,
" and who hath applied for a Commission or Letters of Marque
" and Reprisal, to arm equip and set forth to Sea the said
" as a Private Ship of war, and to make Captures of British Vessels and Cargoes, shall not exceed or transgress the Powers and
" Authorities which shall be contained in the said Commission, but
" shall in all Things observe and conduct himself and govern his
" Crew by and according to the same, and certain Instructions
" therewith to be delivered, and such other Instructions as may
" hereafter be given to him; and shall make reparation for all
" Damages sustained by any Misconduct or unwarrantable Proceedings of himself, or the Officers or Crew of the said
" Then this Obligation shall be void, or else remain in Force.

*" Sealed and Delivered
" in Presence of"*
Which Bond shall be lodged with the said Secretary of Congress.

By Order of Congress,

John Hancock PRESIDENT

Document 1: Transcription (cont.)

IN CONGRESS,
WEDNESDAY, April 3, 1776

INSTRUCTIONS to the Commanders of Private Ships or Vessels of War, which shall have Commissions or Letters of Marque and Reprisal, authorizing them to make Captures of British Vessels and Cargoes.

I.

You may, by Force of Arms, attack, subdue, and take all Ships and other Vessels belonging to the Inhabitants of Great Britain, on the High Seas, or between high-water and low-water Marks, except Ships and Vessels bringing Persons who intend to settle and reside in the United Colonies, or bringing Arms, Ammunition or Warlike Stores to the said colonies, for the Use of such Inhabitants thereof as are Friends to the American Cause, which you shall suffer to pass unmolested, the Commanders thereof permitting a peaceable Search, and giving satisfactory Information of the contents of the Ladings, and Destinations of the Voyages.

II.

You may, by force of Arms, attached, subdue, and take all Ships and other Vessels whatsoever carrying Soldiers, Arms, Gun powder, Ammunition, Provisions, or any other contraband Goods, to any of the British Armies or Ships of War employed against these Colonies.

III.

You shall bring such Ships and Vessels as you shall take, with their Guns, Rigging, Tackle, Apparel, Furniture and Ladings, to some convenient Port or Ports of the United Colonies, that Proceedings may thereupon be had in due Form before the Courts which are or shall be there appointed to hear and determine Causes civil and maritime.

IV.

You or one of your Chief Officers shall bring or send the Master and Pilot and one or more principal Person or Persons of the Company of every Ship or Vessel by you taken, as soon after the Capture as may be, to the Judge or Judges of such Courts as aforesaid, to be examined upon Oath, and make Answer to the Interrogatories which may be propounded touching the interest or Property of the Ship or Vessel and her Lading; and at the same Time you shall deliver or cause to be delivered to the Judge or Judges, all Passes, Sea Briefs, Charter Parties, Bills of Lading, Cockets, Letters, and other Documents and Writings found on Board, proving the said Papers by the Affidavit of yourself, or of some other Person present at the Capture, to be produced as they were received, without Fraud, Addition, Subduction, or Embezzlement.

V.

You shall keep and preserve every Ship or Vessel and Cargo by you taken, until they shall by Sentence of a Court properly authorized be adjudged lawful Prize, not selling, spoiling, wasting, or diminishing the same or breaking the Bulk thereof, nor suffering any such Thing to be done.

VI.

If you, or any of your Officers or Crew shall, in cold Blood, kill or maim, or by Torture or otherwise, cruelly, inhumanly, and contrary to common Usage and the Practice of civilized Nations in War, treat any Person or Persons surprised in the Ship or Vessel you shall take, the Offender shall be severely punished.

VII.

You shall, by all convenient Opportunities, send to Congress written Accounts of the Captures you shall make, with the Number and Names of the Captives, Copies of your journal from Time to Time, and Intelligence of what may occur or be discovered concerning the Designs of the Enemy, and the Destinations, Motions, and Operations of their Fleets and Armies.

VIII.

One Third, at the least, of your whole Company shall be Land Men.

IX.

You shall not ransom any Prisoners or Captives, but shall dispose of them in such Manner as the Congress or if that be not sitting in the Colony whither they shall be brought, as the General Assembly, Convention, or Council or Committee of Safety of such Colony shall direct.

X.

You shall observe all such further Instructions as Congress shall hereafter give in the Premises, when you shall have Notice thereof.

XI.

If you shall do any Thing contrary to these Instructions, or to others hereafter to be given, or willingly suffer such Thing to be done, you shall not only forfeit your Commission, and be liable to an Action for Breach of the Condition of your Bond, but be responsible to the Party grieved for Damages sustained by such Mal-versation.

By Order of CONGRESS.

John Hancock, PRESIDENT

Document 1: Translation

(First Section: "In Congress, April 3, 1776.")


Every person who wants to use a ship for privateering has to give the government some written information. Ship owners must provide the name and size of the ship, the number and weight of guns on the ship, their name and address, and the names of the commander and officers of the ship. The document also has to state the number of crew members and how much food and ammunition is on board. Ship owners must promise that, if they break the rules, they will have enough money to pay a penalty of \$5,000 for a ship that weighs under 100 tons, and \$10,000 if the ship weighs over 100 tons.

(Second Section: "In Congress, Wednesday, April 3, 1776.")

Commanders of privateers have to follow these rules:

1. You may attack and capture any ships belonging to Great Britain except those that are bringing people who plan to live in the United Colonies or those that are bringing guns and ammunition to the colonies. Those ships you may search, but in a peaceful manner.
2. You may attack and capture any British ship bringing soldiers or supplies to the British army.
3. You will take the ships you capture and all of their guns, sails, and supplies to the nearest American port, where a court will make a decision about the case.
4. One of your chief officers will go aboard a vessel when it is captured and bring that ship's officers and all the ship's documents to court. You may not make any changes to those documents.
5. You will not sell anything from any ship you capture until the court tells you that you can.
6. If you or your crew kill or torture anyone other than by the normal causes of war, you will be punished.
7. You will send letters to Congress about the ships you capture, with the names of any prisoners and anything you learn about what the enemy is doing.
8. At least one-third of your company will be land men (men whose ship work is done only on land).
9. You will not let any prisoners buy their freedom; you will follow the colony's directions regarding prisoners.
10. You will follow all of the commands of Congress.
11. If you do not follow these rules, you will no longer be allowed to engage in privateering. You will also have to pay the penalty required of a ship the size of yours.

Document 2: Advertisement



Now fitting for a

Privateer,

In the Harbour of *B E V E R L Y*,
The BRIGANTINE

Washington,

A strong, good vessel for that purpose and a prime sailer.

Any Seamen or Landmen that have an inclination to
Make their Fortunes in a few Months,
May have an Opportunity, by applying to

JOHN DYSON.

Beverly, September 17th, 1776.

Document 3

List of the private armed ships fitted out of Salem during the Revolutionary War from March 1776 through March 1783.

Active	<i>captured</i>	Hammond (Brig)	Pompey
Adventure	<i>captured</i>	Hammond (schooner)	Poole (schooner)
Astrea held		Hampden (ship)	Poole (ship)
Aurora		Harlequin (schooner)	Porus
Banter		Harlequin	Putnam
Beaver		Hasket & John	Rambler
Belsarius		Hawk	Racehorse
Blackford		Has'k & John	Ranger
Black Prince		Harriet	Rainbow
Black Snake		Hazard	Rattlesnake
Brandywine		Hendrick	Raven
Bloodhound		How	Recovery
Brutus	<i>captured</i>	Henry (ship)	Renown
Bowdoin		Henry (schooner)	Revolution
Bunker Hill	<i>captured</i>	Hind	Revolt
Cato	<i>captured</i>	Hyder Ally	Rhodes
Chase		Hope	Roebuck
Chance		Jack	Romulus
Centipede		Jackall	Rover
Creature		James	Salem Packet
Certificate	<i>captured</i>	Jason	Sally
Charm'g Polly	<i>captured</i>	John	Saucy Jack
Civil Usage		Julius Caesar	St. Johns Packet
Concord		Jupiter	Scammel
Congress	<i>captured</i>	Junius Brutus	Scourge
Cutter	<i>captured</i>	Lark	Scorpion
Dart		Languedock	Sculpin
Delight		Lexington	Sacharissa
Dispatch		Lincoln	Shaler
Disdain	<i>captured</i>	Lion	Simon Forester
Don Galvez		Lively	Shark
Dolphin		Lucy	Spring Bird
Eaglet	<i>captured</i>	Loius le Grand	Spitfire
Essex		Macaroni	Sturdy Beggart
Exchange	<i>captured</i>	Mars	Swett
Experiment		Marq. Lafayette	Speedwell
Fame		Mary	Surprise
Fanny		Modesty	Tatne Bush
Favorite		Monmouth	Thomas
Felicity		Montgomery	Thorn
Flying Fish	<i>captured</i>	Morning	Thrasher
Fly		Munroe	Tiger
Franklin	<i>captured</i>	Neptune	Trenton
Fortune	<i>captured</i>	New Adventure	True American
Fox		O. Cromwell	Two Brothers
Gen. Gates		Panther	Two Bros.
Gen. Greene	<i>captured</i>	Patty	Venus
Gen. Lincoln		Pickering	Viper
Gen. Putnam		Pilgrim	Washington
Grand Turk		Phoenix	Warren
Greyhound		Plato	Wild Cat
Griffin		Polacre	William & Anna